



Board of County Commissioners • Escambia County, Florida

Rayme M. Edler, MD, MSPH
Office of the Medical Director

May 9, 2019

County Commissioners,

Due to the decision that will be made today regarding the appropriation of funds for our emergency medical services, I am writing this letter to summarize my concerns along with providing my recommendations.

Yesterday marked a year of my employment as the Medical Director for Escambia County. I assumed responsibility over the correctional center and public safety. There has never been a communication breakdown in reference to the care that has been provided within the correctional center. Why is this different for public safety when the lives in the community are at risk?

I took on the challenge of this position to reform EMS because physicians and hospital staff have been aware of the repeated deficiencies that were being seen due to a lack of training and guidance. Within the first month of employment it became evident what has plagued Escambia EMS: the culture, the organizational structure, poor leadership, the lack of accountability, the lack of training and the refusal to measure true performance. Mr. Jack Brown was made aware of these issues and immediately started to work with me to reform EMS. After Chief White's departure, he asked Chief Nail if he would take over the responsibilities of the EMS Chief with his current duties as Fire Chief. He agreed to take on this challenge with me and we were confident that we could make the positive and necessary changes with the support of Mr. Brown. Due to unforeseen circumstances, there was an abrupt change in the county administration. During the interim, we have attempted to make basic changes that have been persistently met with resistance from the top down. This culture is highly destructive to the delivery of quality prehospital emergency care.

The upper and middle management of ECEMS have not been held accountable for major infractions (and the "practice of medicine" is being "directed" by people with no medical authority and no medical expertise.) Management has been reluctant to change and this behavior affects the quality of patient care, employee retention, and the overall poor standard that impairs the organization. The resulting environment is devoid of quality leadership. I have observed unethical behavior and poor interpersonal skills that toxify the atmosphere resulting in a cadre of employees with low morale, a lack of confidence and varying skill levels.

Exceptional EMS agencies manage progress to identify strength and weaknesses. Benchmarks and data sets are key to navigating the agency forward. Currently the statistics provided by ECEMS/ECFR are skewed:

1.) by assigning units to multiple calls simultaneously, 2.) the electronic health record is deficient in providing accurate statistics to assist with performance measures. This department inadequately measures true performance beginning with response time all the way through patient care. You cannot improve what you cannot measure. As an agency, we cannot excel at our mission without valid information and this is a critical reason the system continues to fail the employees of ECEMS/ECFR and the citizens and visitors of the county.

The individuals who are responsible for the orientation process are also tasked with leading the training department. Our orientation process is outdated and in desperate need of overhaul. The training department is not adequately staffed with an appropriate number of competent educators and there is no formal method to assess the baseline abilities of our providers. Based on the complaints that have made it to my office and a random sampling of reports that have been reviewed for quality assurance, I have reason for grave concern. There is no reliable reporting system or valid indication that anyone can accurately attest to the competence of the Paramedics and EMT's. The lack of training and overall poor decision making on the part of the providers has the potential to lead to significant law suits. Due to the lack of resources and poor management, it has been impossible to verify the proficiency and skill level of all the Paramedics and EMTs that are employed by Escambia County. Many aspects regarding the quality of care has been viewed as substandard. Citizens are needlessly suffering and even dying unnecessarily due to the lack of training and accountability. It is crucial to provide these emergency funds for my recommended training by an agency that is readily available, staffed, and equipped to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community.

To address these concerns, an **EMERGENT** request for BOCC approval to authorize the use of EMS reserve funds for immediate training of the Paramedics and EMTs was submitted to Matt Coughlin on January 18, 2019 by Chief Nail. He specifically stated that this matter was time sensitive, as he felt that the normal procurement process would increase negative outcomes during the interim timeframe. This emergent decision was made as a team, after review of the complaints and noted deficiencies within the department. At no point was I consulted by Matt Coughlin or Amy Lovoy regarding my concerns and the necessary emergent funding request regarding **MEDICAL** training that I deemed necessary to decrease liability and to provide for the safety of the community. The lack of regard for medical direction goes all the way to the top. The decision to not push this forward as an emergent request on the next agenda in January was made by individuals with no medical expertise. Why prolong what can make a difference between life and death?

As a Board Certified Emergency Medical Physician, and the Escambia County Medical Director, I am strongly advising you to allow this training to proceed forward immediately with a readily available, staffed, and equipped agency that can provide the training that I deem necessary. If you disregard my recommendation, and further delay the emergent training request, I have provided an AMA form (Against Medical Advice) to be signed by each Commissioner.

Upon hire I was entrusted to provide the best possible emergency medical care to Escambia County, and I will not derogate from my responsibility. There cannot be a continuous breakdown of communication between myself, the office of the county administrator, and the Board of County Commissioners. This lack of communication and disregard for medical direction is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of our community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rayme M. Edler', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rayme M. Edler, MD, MSPH



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AGAINST MEDICAL ADVICE – ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & WAIVER

Due to the complaints and documented deficiencies such as lack of competency, lack of training and poor-medical decision making within Escambia County Public Safety Department, it is my recommendation that the BOCC approve **EMERGENCY** funding to rectify these deficiencies immediately. I recommend a third-party service that is readily available and equipped to provide the required training that will bring **ALL** Emergency Medical Providers to a level of proficiency that will ensure quality of patient care and protect the citizens and visitors of this county. This training is long overdue. This decision is a **MEDICAL** decision that is made by a Board Certified Emergency Medical Physician based upon the findings that have been observed and documented. The Medical Director believes this recommendation is in the best interest of the county's medical providers and the citizens and visitors of Escambia County.

Failure to proceed forward with this initiative on an **EMERGENCY** request exposes the citizens and visitors of Escambia County to a higher than necessary risk of substandard emergency medical care. Liability increases exponentially each day this request is delayed.

I, Commissioner _____, the elected representative of District _____, has elected not to follow the recommendations of the Escambia County Medical Director and accepts responsibility for any consequences of that decision. The risks of not following the Medical Director's recommendations have been fully explained to the Commissioner. The Commissioner, on behalf of their District, agrees that the Medical Director, Rayme M. Edler, MD, MSPH, shall not be held responsible or legally liable for the decision or any past/future consequences of acting **AGAINST MEDICAL ADVICE** that result in negligent patient care.

Commissioner's Signature Date

County Attorney's Signature Date

County Administrator Signature Date

Medical Director's Signature Date